

Dear Folks

Thank you so much for your kind wishes, your attendance & from our helpers & performers, your hard work on the day. It was valued by all there, & the gathering & the unveiling were a great success. We were graced with the company of people including those rarer South Australian descendants, interested parties from Chicago, Donegal & New South Wales. A blessing was given us by John O'Reilly's appearance with the Briggs family, Lorna & Katherine Briggs & daughter, Lorna being the widow of Victor Briggs who gave the *Welcome to Country* at the inaugural 1998 ceremony. It was marvellous to see people who had shared Sydney's ceremony at the end of August, & a large young part of the audience. There was even an Irish Famine Orphan family reunion contingent.

Our MC Dr Val Noone, in Ireland with wife Mary Doyle for his doctorate award as we speak, always leads a segment for descendants to share their family & orphan's names & ship, & there seemed to be a particularly rich sharing of oral history throughout the day. Our Member for Williamstown, Wade Noonan MP, a tireless worker & great supporter of local history & the Bay Trail Markers, spoke of his family's early beginnings in Williamstown. Our new Mayor, Councillor Sandra Wilson is fascinated by the Orphans' story, & spoke with depth & understanding. She tellingly made the link of modern day people trafficking, with the various ways of moving populations by governments & profiteers more focused on exploitation, than all profiting from sharing hearts, humanity & assets.

Our Guest Speaker, Dr Liz Rushen clearly shared her panoramic grasp of the early female immigrants' era, with *A Trail of Emigration*; for short example, instancing re-location being touted in Irish Post Offices & from the pulpit. My speech *The Kindness of Strangers*, was a melange of local & oral history stories aligned with the latest developments in our research, highlighting the many facets of concern for the Orphans' beginnings & their journeys through the generations.

To share just two leading lights, Felix Molski's work through <http://www.kosciuszkoheritage.com/home.html> with the gifting of free copies of the documentary DVD <http://www.kosciuszkoheritage.com/strzeleckifilm/> enumerating the Polish explorer of Australia, Sir Paul Strzelecki's innovative humanitarian work relieving Irish families during the Great Famine (some still available). I am

sure many of you Irish Famine Orphan descendants like me, are touched repeatedly by how strangers take to the Orphans' stories, moved by their suffering & experiences.

The second aspect is of the amazing finds being generated even as we speak by Christine O'Donnell's ongoing project of digitising all "IFO business" on the Public Record Office of Victoria's website, & the Irish Government's Reaching Out website <http://www.irelandxo.com/> showcasing the work of precious local history guides back in Ireland. Long may the work & knitting together of the lost souls' diaspora continue.

Towards the end of the day, Dr Noone spoke of the old Celtic belief that the Other Worlds were not above or below us, but interwoven with our daily reality, as there was a palpable powerful presence generated by years of gathering at the port around Famine Rock, & its counterpart across the seashore path, a Grandmothers' portal if you will, the Irish Famine Orphans' Bay Trail Marker. Hobsons Bay was congratulated for its initiation of the Marker by previous Mayor Angela Altair, part of a 23 kilometre trail around the Western bays, & guiding my telling the background & tale of the Orphans' journey, with six ships to Melbourne; Sarah O'Malley and second ship *Pemberton* underscore the personal perspective. Like so many pioneer stories, one story can illuminate a never-ending panoply of relatedness. In starting her working life by taking the brig *Raven* with 37 other Orphans to Portland, she worked for seminal pioneers of Portland such as the Allisons, Hentys & Learmonths, as well as for herself & family as a seamstress, & spent part of her mothering life on the Bendigo goldfields. I encourage you to record your stories as they are the building blocks in understanding humanity through one's own families, & to pay it forward for tomorrow's genealogists.

Special mention must go to the sterling work of our soundman Ned Dawson, & the double duty of the Brophys, Margie & Vince as steady rocks within the eddies. Our musicians' playing is always a joy of the day, so too young local Jake Gallagher's wonderful recital of James Wallace's poem, Wallace being the second Headmaster of St Mary's Primary School, Williamstown. We are lucky to have such stellar performers to hearten & inspire us; this also includes a rare appearance of Billie Finnie, the kindly eyed Irish Terrier.

Below I shall tell you some IFO references which you can enjoy, or even add to your own family history holdings. Keep those stories & updates coming folks. If the descendants of *Pemberton*'s Eliza Darcy would like to contact me & tell her

story, I may be able to link you with an eager descendant. If anyone has changed their email recently or knows of someone who has, do let me know - although so many visitors kindly filled in the Visitors' Book, no one left their email addresses.

**Thank you all for your support in a myriad of ways. If there are any amongst you who wish to be more involved in this local history, perhaps garner resume or school credits, please contact me, as I am in great need of help during the year, especially with our growing crowd of nearly 200 this year.**

As Christmas approaches, take a quiet moment of reflection to enjoy the richness of the Great Grandmothers from Ireland's legacies to us all, the overcoming of the Great Famine, mourned and celebrated on that second-last Sunday of November,

In deep appreciation,

Debra Vaughan

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- *The Irish Famine Orphans: Their Life & Times in Pictures* was hosted by Williamstown Library's Heritage Centre
- This week's *Irish Echo* featured an article on Commemoration Day - sometime after publication, it will make it to the net.
- This week's installment of SBS' series *Secrets Of The Irish Landscape* Episode 3, focuses on how people changed that landscape, including Great Famine stories - you can catch up on 9.5 thousand years of history on-line via SBS On Demand to quote them: "*The legacy of the Famine is with us today...we don't recognise the violence of the Famine... a tremendously different landscape.*".
- Local papers gave us some marvellous photos along with their reportage:
- <http://www.maribyrnongweekly.com.au/story/1792911/ireland-s-great-famine-fed-our-rich-history/>
- <http://williamstown.starcommunity.com.au/star/2013-11-19/marking-irish-heritage/>
- Christine O'Donnell's IFO beginnings & PROV wiki  
<http://prov.vic.gov.au/blog-news/irish-famine-orphans>

- Don't forget the ever-present wonderful resource <http://tintean.org.au/2013/11/01/irish-famine-orphan-girls-commemoration/>